



J. Carlton Courter, III
Commissioner

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Division of Animal Industry Services

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Whom It May Concern

William M. Sims, Jr.

FROM: Dr. William M. Sims, Jr.
State Veterinarian

SUBJECT: Game Birds and Avian Influenza

Virginia has recently experienced an outbreak of Avian Influenza (AI). During the period of March 13 to July 2, 2002, 197 chicken and turkey farming operations in the Shenandoah Valley were affected, resulting in the destruction and disposal of approximately 4.7 million birds. Costs to the Federal and State governments for eradicating the disease and losses to poultry companies and growers exceed \$100 million.

North Carolina and West Virginia had small outbreaks and there is some evidence suggesting connections with the Virginia outbreak. In North Carolina, there were six (6) premises with infected quail. DNA testing performed during this outbreak showed the virus to be similar in all of these farm outbreaks and also similar to the live bird market virus found in New York and New Jersey.

Individuals involved with game birds for shooting preserves, field trials, propagation or in any other manner need to protect their birds from infection with this highly contagious virus. As a minimum, the following actions should be taken:

- ☐ Limit access to your birds by outsiders such as customers, the curious and delivery and service personnel that have been on other premises with poultry or game birds.
- ☐ Do not visit other premises with birds unless absolutely necessary. If visits are required, clean and disinfect clothes, equipment, etc. that were on other farms prior to returning to your farm and interacting with your birds.
- ☐ Buy from and limit purchases to reputable dealers.
- ☐ Use disposable shipping containers for only one shipment and then dispose of the container, or use shipping containers that can be cleaned and disinfected between each shipment.

- When cages and pens are emptied of birds between shipments, clean and disinfect thoroughly.
- Observe your birds daily, looking for clinical signs of illness. If observed, contact Dr. Gabriel Meza at the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Harrisonburg Regional Diagnostic Laboratory (540-434-3897) for information concerning the submission of samples for testing.
- Game birds should be kept isolated from other birds or commercial poultry.
- Wild bird feeders should not be used on premises with game birds to minimize the game bird exposure.

At this time, we are requiring extensive testing of commercial poultry in our surveillance programs to insure the AI virus has been eradicated from Virginia. This includes the testing of commercial poultry entering Virginia from other states for slaughter in Virginia. We also have a ban on public shows and public sales of poultry such as county fairs and bird shows.

We are assessing the risk of game birds in the spread of AI. If those involved can follow the above recommendations and our determinations prove the separation and handling of game birds is such that the risk of their spreading disease within the game bird and commercial industry is minimal, no further actions may be indicated. If the risk of disease spread is there, then actions may be initiated for surveillance testing of game birds.

Thank you for your support and attention to increased biosecurity for game birds. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Gabriel Meza (540-434-3897) or Dr. Bruce Akey (804-786-9202).

cc: Commissioner J. Carlton Courter, III, VDACS
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Mr. William Woodfin, Director, VDGIF
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